



An Exmoor Ram. First prize Royal Show, 1903

The Importance of a Pedigree

"My first lesson in the value of a pedigree, came to me unexpectedly while I was helping the owners deliver two bunches of feeders to a firm that fed several thousand head annually. One bunch was made up of northern bred cattle in the days before improved blood had been introduced. The others were native bred, from Central Ohio, from superior sires. It was autumn and both bunches had grazed side by side in the same pasture during the whole season. When the first lot went over the scales the owner protested that he was getting short weight and had the scales carefully tested. The weighing again proceeded, but with no better results. The better bred cattle were then driven over the scales and the weight recorded, to the astonishment of the first owner, who again thought the weights must be wrong and could not understand how the little ones could weigh more than his big ones. The buyer quickly remarked, 'Blood weighs.' That was all that buyer said, but it set me to thinking and ever since I have been a believer in the value and potency of blood.

I believe in pedigree for man and beast, I would not buy a dog without a pedigree and unless my judgment were at fault I most certainly would not buy a pedigree without a dog. There was a mingling of dry humor and philosophy in the words of two Scotch cattle breeders recently, when, as one led out a bull to be inspected, and remarked, "He has a grand pedigree," the other replied, "I never saw a beast that needed one more."

A pedigree is an authentic record of the ancestors of an animal. It ought to, and sometimes does, contain more than a mere record of ancestry. Pedigrees are very generally overrated or underrated. The error is usually manifest in one extreme or the other. Pedigrees wreck some breeders and make others. In one case pedigree is the key to success, and in another the rock upon which the ship founders. To others who as breeders are never made or unmade by anything, and who never attain a creditable rank, pedigree is nothing.

The first essential in a pedigree is completeness. A pedigree to be of the highest value must be full and explicit in all particulars. The second is authenticity. Without this the entire pedigree is worthless. The third is the individuality or excellence of ancestry found in the pedigree. All pedigrees are more or less incomplete in regard to this requisite, except as

they furnish the show ring or prize winning record of the ancestry and the foot note commentary.

The next requisite of a good pedigree is integrity and reliability of the breeder, and in importance this deserves to take rank at the top of the list. The pedigree itself naturally affords no information as to this important feature. This must come from other sources and yet it is of such vital consequence as to be virtually an inherent part of the pedigree.

We need to study individuality of breeders as well as individuality of cattle and hogs, or other animals. The next requisite, and closely connected with the one preceding, is the skill of the breeder. The value of the pedigree is affected by the ability as well as the integrity of the breeder. It does not require a careful observer at the sale ring to note the fact that the names of the men appearing as breeders of a line of ancestors in a pedigree can easily make a difference of twenty-five or fifty or one hundred per cent. in the selling value of an animal and the breeding value may be affected to even a larger extent.

The last requisite which I will enumerate is prepotency. It is a common and fairly well grounded saying that even the most successful breeders never succeed in getting more than one or two very great sires in a lifetime. Most of the world's greatest breeders owe their reputation primarily to one such sire. Many breeders do not secure even one in a life time. There are comparatively few strongly prepotent breeding animals.

The only absolute evidence of such prepotency is that which comes from actual test in the breeding herd, although most animals which possess this quality in marked degree have certain unmistakable indications of their strong breeding qualities, and this quality, when found, is quite generally transmitted by the offspring.

Pedigree is a means of good or evil in stock breeding. I have never known a successful breeder of any kind of stock who was not a careful student of pedigrees. Yet the field of breeding is strewn with wrecks and failures due to false standards of the value of pedigree. A pedigree craze followed blindly means certain disaster. There is always great danger of pushing the so-called fashionable and popular lines of breeding to the danger point. Pedigree followed blindly is fanaticism in breeding.

A good pedigree never makes a good

animal, yet it is a significant fact that a superior animal almost invariably has a good pedigree. This is worth noting. It means that a good pedigree is an essential factor in producing a good animal.

A good pedigree without a good animal is worthless, and even a positive injury. As a practical breeder once put it: "Of all the scraps in existence, deliver me from the pedigreed scrub." He was right, for the prepotency that comes from the concentration of blood lines is just as certain to perpetuate bad qualities as good ones. There is no greater fallacy in breeding than the assumption that practically any kind of a pure-bred or pedigreed animal will do, and that all the animals belonging to any particular breed possess the highest and best characteristics of that breed. It is that kind of credulity which furnishes customers for gold bricks.

Many breeders who breed and feed stock only for the market think the question of pedigree is of no concern to them. This view is entirely erroneous. There is no place where good bloods count for more than on the block. It has made a difference as high as 25 to 50 per cent. in the value of the finished product, or the carcass, in experiments conducted at the Ohio experiment station. It may be truthfully asserted that you can get a good piece of beef steak or a choice roast in any of the markets today without a good pedigree back of it. This at first seems like an extravagant statement, but it is literally true. Go onto the market any day of the year and look at the cattle that sell at the top price and you will observe unmistakable evidence of good blood. These things do not come by chance.

Every good steer you find in a feed lot has a pedigree and the better the pedigree the better the steer. There are inherent reasons for animal excellence. There are generations of good breeding. The animals that top the market may not have a written or recorded pedigree. The pedigree is none the less genuine, however, and none the less a potent factor in the product. A pedigree in its fullest sense is in brief a summary or record of all that operates to make an animal what it is. No successful breeder of any class of live stock ever ignores pedigree. It is only when we place undue stress on "blue blood" and follow pedigree blindly that its influence is injurious.—From an address by Prof. C. F. Curtis, Iowa Experiment Station.

Exmoor Sheep

The Exmoor breed of sheep are among the few true survivors of the old forest or mountain breeds of England. The Exmoors have white legs and faces, and black nostrils, and are horned, the horns curling closely to the head. They are delicately formed about the head and neck, but the carcasses are narrow. They are exceedingly hardy and when fattened at 2½ or 3 years old arrive at 12 or 14 lbs. weight per quarter. The county in which the Exmoors are reared is generally surcharged with water after the autumnal rains; yet the hardy character of these sheep enable them to withstand such adverse conditions. Their summer pasture is scanty, while their winter food consists chiefly of what they pick up while ranging over extensive tracts of pasturage, with the assistance, in extreme weather, of a little indifferent hay, obtained from the coarse herbage of the marshes. By reason of their superior hardiness of constitution and more especially their power of resisting wet, generally so injurious to sheep, they maintain their position in the south-west of England, under circumstances where other sheep would fail to thrive.

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